

James Madison University JMU Scholarly Commons

Libraries

Libraries & Educational Technologies

2015

Undisciplined liaisons: Providing liaison librarian services to university units beyond academic departments

Kristen S. Shuyler

James Madison University, shuyleks@jmu.edu

Stefanie Warlick

James Madison University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/letfspubs>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Shuyler, Kristen S. and Warlick, Stefanie, "Undisciplined liaisons: Providing liaison librarian services to university units beyond academic departments" (2015). *Libraries*. Paper 34.

<http://commons.lib.jmu.edu/letfspubs/34>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries & Educational Technologies at JMU Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Libraries by an authorized administrator of JMU Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact dc_admin@jmu.edu.

Undisciplined liaisons: Providing liaison services to university units beyond academic departments

By Kristen Shuyler and Stefanie Warlick
James Madison University

A roundtable discussion at ACRL 2015 Conference in Portland, Oregon
Submitted November 2014; accepted January 2015; presented March 2015

Short Program Description:

Can we sustainably extend liaison programs beyond disciplines to include student affairs departments, student groups, interdisciplinary research centers, and other groups on campus? This roundtable explores the idea of expanding liaison programs to recognize the importance of holistic approaches to student development. Many libraries already have successful relationships with student support services, ranging from informal connections forged out of shared interests, to formal learning commons. Can creating broader liaison programs further contribute to student success?

Long Program Description:

Universities are heavily invested in a holistic approach to student success. Modern campuses focus on developing the whole student and preparing graduates to become educated citizens, leaders, and lifelong learners. College students have come to expect many services and resources outside of traditional academic support. In their integrated college experience, students take advantage of many opportunities beyond the classroom, such as student clubs, multicultural student affairs, study abroad programs, and more. Library liaison programs have traditionally focused on providing academic and curricular support within a disciplinary, departmental framework. Is it time to broaden our approach to library engagement on our campuses? Many libraries already have successful relationships with student services, but these are not always integrated into the library's organizational structure. Are there opportunities to expand our liaison programs? Can libraries systematically extend our collections, services, and relationships to include student affairs departments, student groups, interdisciplinary research centers, and other groups on campus? If liaison programs are expanded in this way, it will be essential to further develop our liaison models in a way that is sustainable in terms of both personnel and budget. Liaison librarians have already begun to develop new skill-sets and expertise to meet evolving demands from their academic departments. Further expanding liaison relationships to non-academic units will certainly result in additional unique needs. If libraries embrace this broader approach to liaison work, librarians and administrators will need to make difficult decisions about priorities, including possibly identifying current services to curtail. Even if libraries are not prepared to offer comprehensive or formal liaison services to the student affairs side of the house, it will be important to consider the impact this trend in higher education might have on library operations and strategic planning.

Discussion questions:

1. Should current models of traditional liaison work be adapted to fit these new relationships to non-academic units, or should new models of liaison work be developed?
2. What units and groups beyond traditional departments are librarians in the roundtable already working with? Are these official liaison relationships or unofficial partnerships?
3. How can new liaison relationships to additional departments, groups, and units beyond the disciplines happen without creating additional work for a team of liaison librarians? How could this idea be made sustainable, both in terms of staff time and budget?

Rough notes from discussion with 14 people participating:

1. Should current models of traditional liaison work be adapted to fit these new relationships to non-academic units, or should new models of liaison work be developed?

The discussion group did not have a clear consensus around this either-or question, but it seemed that most of us agreed that:

- it's important to reach out to non-academic units,
- it's important to think about how to reach non-traditional students and faculty, and
- most libraries don't have enough librarian positions to do this kind of work within a "traditional" liaison model or an adaptation of this model.

A few discussants noted that it is sometimes unclear when this type of work is "liaison" work and when it's "outreach" work.

2. What units and groups beyond traditional departments are librarians in the roundtable already working with? Are these official liaison relationships or unofficial partnerships?

In terms of units or programs that librarians are already working with (or could work with), a wide range of ideas were mentioned, including:

- university business offices
- university marketing offices
- institutional review boards
- first year programs
- student government associations
- athletics
- international student centers
- writing centers
- career services

- tutoring services
- information technology offices
- disabilities services
- recreation centers
- centers for teaching and learning
- wellness programs
- graduate services offices
- veterans support programs
- distance/online education programs
- undergraduate research programs
- orientation for new students
- orientation for new faculty
- study abroad programs

One or more in the discussion group also mentioned non-university populations to consider reaching out to, specifically the local communities near our institutions, and the nearby high schools.

Other specific ideas for working outside the traditional academic departmental boundaries included:

- creating libguides for non-academic departments
- getting assigned to university-wide committees and advisory boards
- working with athletics teams and coaches; student-athletes often have early-start classes
- focusing on grad students; providing them services to support their work as first-time teachers
- reaching out to part-time faculty and adjunct faculty
- providing workshops for senior researchers on campus
- providing research services to senior administrators

3. How can new liaison relationships to additional departments, groups, and units beyond the disciplines happen without creating additional work for a team of liaison librarians? How could this idea be made sustainable, both in terms of staff time and budget?

The group concluded that although the idea of providing services to and cultivating relationships with non-academic units is important, most liaison librarians can't give up other areas of responsibility to do this effectively. One idea raised in the discussion was to consider whether library assistant staff members could serve as unofficial liaisons to non-academic units. This would allow staff with particular interests, such as in athletics for example, the opportunity to gain skills and do creative work while ensuring that these units receive some attention from the libraries.